

TESTIMONY: HB 4714

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I am grateful to the House Michigan Competitiveness Committee for providing an opportunity for the public to comment on HB 4714. My frame of reference for commenting on this legislation is both religious and personal. Currently, I serve as the Director of the Michigan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Network, a statewide network of Unitarian Universalist activists from 27 UU congregations. One of the moral principles of the Unitarian Universalist denomination is that all people deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. Our Unitarian Universalist denomination has joined with a wide range of faith organizations that affirm that access to health care is a moral imperative. We affirm -- with other people of faith -- that our society is whole only when we care for the most vulnerable among us. Medicaid expansion is an important way that Michigan can not only help its vulnerable citizens to preserve their health, but it allows us -- as Michigan citizens -- to become morally whole.

This spring I was admitted to William Beaumont Hospital for what I learned was a life threatening blood clot. If I hadn't had health insurance I probably would have put off seeing a doctor. With an undetected clot, I could have suffered from a stroke or a pulmonary embolism. Without health care coverage, I could have become a financial burden to taxpayers and to my family. I am grateful that I have health insurance coverage. Michigan needs a smart and compassionate plan to expand Medicaid to 400,000 additional Michiganders with incomes below 133% of poverty. Governor Rick Snyder, the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, Michigan businesses, the Michigan Hospital Association and many consumer groups, such as mine, support such a bill.

I appreciate that legislators have made an effort to expand Medicaid coverage through HB 4714. However, I'm very concerned that this legislation will short change the poor as well as Michigan taxpayers. It will limit health care coverage to only four years. Medical conditions, such as multiple sclerosis or diabetes, don't end after four years. The majority of people who would benefit from Medicaid expansion are working but don't get health coverage as part of their employment. HB 4714 unrealistically demands that all patients pay 5 percent of their income to receive benefits. More troubling is that HB 4714 seems unlikely to be approved by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services so that it will not bring any benefits to Michigan or its people. During April, the Department had issued a statement that it would not accept caps on Medicaid coverage.

Adopting a smart and compassionate Medicaid expansion makes good sense from both a moral and an economic standpoint. Michigan legislators should do the right thing. They should support the Governor's vision of accepting federal help to bring real health care coverage to Michigan families.